



# Access and Opportunity: Assessing the Factors Contributing to Women’s Education in West Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Through global initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals, women’s access to education has been a main priority of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations alike around the world. But how successful are international, national, and local campaigns to support women’s access to education? What factors contribute to the success rate of women’s opportunity for education in West Africa? This project will:

- Identify the factors that contribute to women’s access and opportunity to education in West Africa.
- Analyzing country data, national surveys, and reports from various intergovernmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations.
- Offer recommendations for how women’s access and opportunity to education can be improved in West Africa.

## OBJECTIVES

- To identify the factors leading to gender inequality in education
- To assess literacy rates amongst women (compared to men)
- To discuss the goals and projects implemented by international and local nongovernmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations.

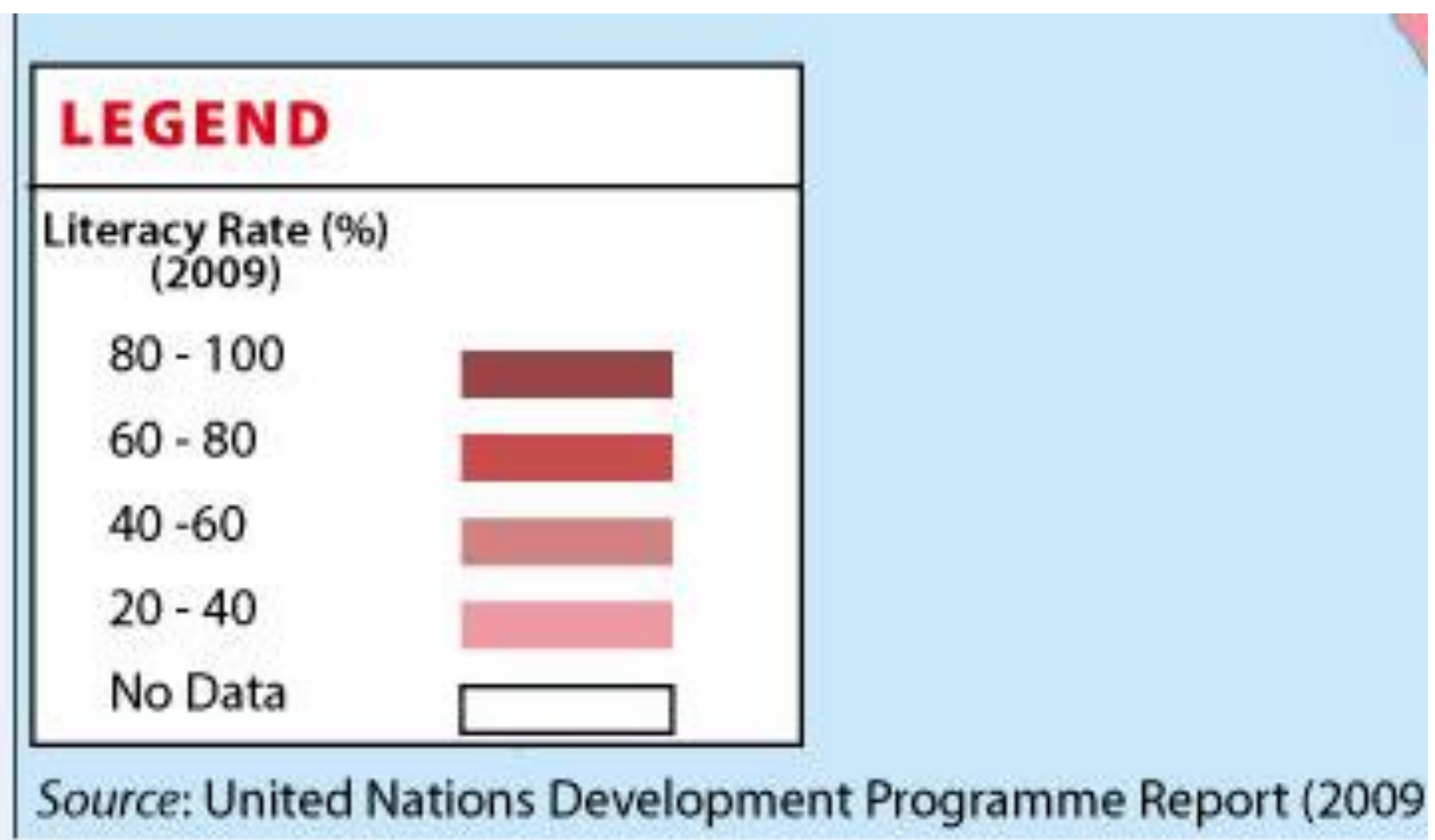
## GENDER AND EDUCATION

- The increase in the importance given to education in sub-Saharan is based on the assumption that it promotes social and economic development.
- Education, particularly for women, will help decrease poverty, prevent diseases, and eradicate violence.
- The factors leading to an increase in gender inequality in education are driven by poverty, cultural values, attitudes and practices, that include early marriage, female circumcision and house chores.
- The lack of qualified teachers, good teaching methodology, accessible teaching and learning materials, could create a school environment favorable to boys rather than girls.
- Safe and sanitary conditions in schools is a major issue affecting health and safety risk for girls.
- These conditions and lack of privacy can account for girls not attending school as well as the frequent sexual harassment by teachers. For example, in sub-Saharan African, 31% of primary schools do not have toilets.
- In sub- Saharan Africa, more than 1 in 3 adults cannot read, 182 million adults are unable to read and write, 48 million youths (ages 15-24) are illiterate and 22% of primary aged children are not in school.

## METHODS

- Analyze education initiatives in West Africa by collecting reports produced by organizations related to human rights, women’s rights, and education.
- Read and evaluate scholarship in the fields of African politics and gender studies.
- Assess national surveys and public opinion data related to women’s access to education.

## LITERACY RATES IN WEST AFRICA



➤ With Focus to West Africa, Guinea, Mali and Niger are amongst the 20%-40% literacy rate

## CASE STUDIES

- **Guinea**
  - 78% of girls will never enter school (UNESCO)
  - 21.80% of female in Guinea are literate (World Bank 2010)
  - In 2005, 37.9% of girls aged 15-19 were married, divorced or widowed (SIGI)
- **Mali**
  - 93% of girls will never enter school (UNESCO)
  - 39% of female in Mali are literate (World Bank 2011)
  - Single sex toilets in primary school account for 19% and mixed toilet account for 48% (UNESCO)
- **Niger**
  - 83% of girls will never enter school (UNESCO)
  - 15% of female in Niger are literate (World Bank 2012)
  - Single sex toilets account for 18% and 9% for mixed toilets in primary school (UNESCO)

## CONCLUSIONS

- In Guinea, 2% of girls have left school and 20% of girls will enter late (over 10 years) (UNESCO).
- In Mali, 3% of girls have left school and 4% of girls will enter late (over 10 years) (UNESCO).
- In Niger, 4% of girls have left school and 12% of girls will enter late (UNESCO).
- As the education level rises, enrollment in school decreases especially for girls.
- The factors that lead to low literacy rates amongst women include poverty, household chores, early marriage, poor school conditions and low-skilled teachers (UNESCO).
- Government policies and laws granting equal rights to men and women are not properly enforced, causing gender disparity to keep increasing (SIGI).
- Through the help of local campaigns, NGOs and IOs initiatives have been taken to eradicate gender disparity and provide opportunities for girls.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amongst the many initiatives and goals set to work in favor of women and the promotion and granting of their rights, NGOs are working effectively against gender disparities.
- Ex: Plan International’s movement; Because I Am A Girl, which promotes girls’ rights. Plan International starts with “collaborating with children, communities, civil society, governments and other partners to implement long-term programs that target the root causes of inequality” (Plan International).
- **Results include:**
  - 2390 schools were built or rehabilitated
  - 76,352 people were trained in vocational and business skills.
- Ex: Niger IMAGINE Project implemented by Plan International which provides access to education, having qualified teachers for better student performance and community involvement in the promotion of girls’ education. The project includes activities that provide help:
  - Clean and supply schools
  - Encourage parents to send their girls to school
  - Construct additional classrooms
  - Rehabilitate clean water taps for school use
  - Implement community mentoring programs
- **Results:**
  - 31.5% average increase in girls enrollment rate in targeted schools,
  - 10% average increase of girls enrollment in targeted regions
  - 7.4% reduction in gender gap
  - 31.5% girls and boys 24.1%

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